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ABSTRACT

The role of literature in education is examined, and implications for assessment of student understanding of literature are outlined. There are three distinct views of the role of literature in school. Literature is variously construed as an adjunct to the learning of reading and writing, as a subject with its own body of knowledge, and as an aspect of aesthetic perception. Rather than selecting any one of these views, this paper divides the domain of school literature into three interrelated aspects: (1) knowledge; (2) practice; and (3) habit. The interrelationships among these aspects are complex in that knowledge is applied in the various acts that constitute the practices and habits, and the practices and habits can influence knowledge. It is suggested, however, that these three aspects can be distinguished for the purpose of curriculum planning, and their separability is demonstrated for the purpose of testing. The testing approach, developed by the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature at the University of Albany (New York), involves six tests covering short stories, poetry, and non-fiction articles. Test items cover surface understanding, comprehension, text structure, and figurative language. Likert scales are used to measure aesthetic judgment, and a questionnaire is used to assess reading habits. (TJH)

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THE DOMAIN OF SCHOOL LITERATURE
A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSMENT

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One of the research strands of the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature concerns issues of assessment of learning in literature. The first phase of that strand comprised an analysis of the available tests in secondary school (Brody, DeMilo, and Purves, 1989). The analysis showed that for the most part the tests that contained literary passages asked questions about them as if they were the same as passages from encyclopedias. There was some testing of literary knowledge but virtually no testing of knowledge or application of critical terminology and virtually no testing of analysis or aesthetic judgment.

In order to see how this situation might be changed, the research team then turned to an examination of experimental measures and measures that had been used in other systems of education around the world. From this assortment as well as from an analysis of curricular statements, the group began to establish a depiction of the domain of literature learning in secondary school. This review showed that there were three complementary or competing views of the domain: that literature is an adjunct of the language arts, that it comprises a distinct body of knowledge, and that it is an aspect of aesthetic perception. Thus literature is seen alternatively as a stimulus for reading and writing, as an aspect of the humanities, and as one of the arts.

School literature has often been fitted---rather uncomfortably into "the language arts," which are defined as reading, writing, speaking and

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listening. Since literature involves texts that people read or write, and since when students read literature they often write about what they have read, literature is often seen as simply a subset of reading and writing, with an occasional nod to speaking and listening. Literature fits into the program as something pleasant to read and perhaps as something interesting to write about. This view seems to prevail in the basal reading approach to elementary schools (see Walmsley, 1989), and it carries on into the secondary school curriculum. Literature is a content to promote skills in reading and writing or to promote individual growth, depending upon the ideology attached to the language arts. In the current world of tests, literature is usually a vehicle for reading comprehension tests or for measures of writing skill or proficiency.

A second perspective shows literature as a school subject with its own body of knowledge. This body consists primarily of literary texts, perhaps specified by genre, date, theme, author, and other classifications. Which particular texts are set in part by experts, in part by those who purvey textbooks, and in part by teachers and curriculum planners. There are three other broad areas of literature content: 1.historical and background information concerning authors, texts, and the times in which they were written or that form their subject matter; 2. information concerning critical terminology, critical strategies, and literary theory; 3. information of a broad cultural nature such as that emerging from folklore and mythology which forms a necessary starting point for the reading of many literary texts. This perspective on the domain has been criticized as focussing too much on things external to the text; at the same time many have argued that such knowledge is crucial to the acts of reading and writing. In the world of testing, there are a few current commercial tests that concentrate on this sort of knowledge (usually at the college level), although it formed the basis of the 1987 study of cultural knowledge (Finn and Ravitch, 1987; Applebee, Langer, and Mullis, 1987).

There is yet another group, a growing and vocal minority that sees the domain of literature learning as the development of a different kind of reading from that used with other texts. This kind of reading is called "aesthetic" and is opposed to the reading that one does with informational texts. Recent literary theory has come to view literature less in terms of

the writer and more in terms of the reader, for it appears to be the reader, particularly the informed and trained reader who defines a text as literary and reads it not for the information but for the experience of th nuances of the text itself. Such a definition follows from the strand of thinking that developed from I. A. Richard's Practical Cricicism, where the idea that the reader helped form the meaning of the text was given cogent voice. The summary of the position is best expressed by Louise Rosenblatt in The Reader, The Text and the Poem (1977) who says that literary texts are grounded in the real world of writers who may intend them to be seen poetically or not. Once written, texts become alive only when they are read, and they become literary when a sufficient body of readers choose to read them as aesthetic objects rather than as documents. These readers bring a great deal of background knowledge concerning the substance, structure, and style of the texts in order to ascertain the meaning and significance of the text. The meaning is that which can be verified by other readers of the text and by recourse to the historical grounding of the text, if such is available. The significance is personal or perhaps communal.

Thus a major function of literature education is the development of what one might call preferences or habits of mind in reading and writing. One must learn to read aesthetically and to switch lenses when one moves from social studies to poetry. In addition, literature education is supposed to develop something called "taste" or the love of "good literature," so that literature education goes beyond reading and writing in the inculcation of specific sets of preferred habits of reading and writing about that particular body of texts which is called literature.

Towards a synthesis. Rather than being forced to choose among the three views we would argue that the domain of school literature can be divided into three interrelated aspects: **knowledge**, **practice**, and **habit**. The interrelationships are complex in that one uses knowledge in the various acts that constitute the practice and habits, and that the practices and habits can have their influence on knowledge. At the same time one can separate them for the purposes ofcurriculum planning and as we shall see, testing. We may schematize the three sub-domains as indicated in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

We have a bit of short-hand here. The cultural knowledge can be contained in texts like myths and folk tales or it can exist outside of texts. We have used responding to cover reading, watching, listening. It includes decoding or making out the plain sense of the text or film, envisioning or coming to some whole impression and recreation of what is read, and the more detailed aspects of analyzing, personalizing,and interpreting. Often people envision without analyzing or interpreting.

We use "articulating" to cover a wide variety of ways by which students let people know what their response is. This is the key to the curriculum in many ways. It is not just reading in a closet but bringing an envisonment of what is read out into the open. Like any school subject, literature involves public acts in which the student must be more articulate about procedures and strategies as well as conclusions than might be true of the subject outside of school. Proofs are not necessary in mathematical applications outside of school; essays about one's reading of a text are not required after reading every library book.

In order to preserve the aesthetic nature of the text, and treat the work of literature as literature not as a treatise on whales, the curriculum seeks to inculcate a set of habits. If literary works are not read and talked about as other kinds of texts are read but are to be read differently, students must learn how to perform this kind of reading and they must be encouraged to read this way voluntarily. The curriculum then must seek to promote habits of mind in reading and writing. One of these habits is to make aesthetic judgments about the various texts read and to justify these judgments publically. Personal preference is not sufficient to the curriculum, one must learn to be a critic in the sense of a judge. In some cases it is desired that specific criteria be used, usually formal or thematic criteria rather than personal ones.

Since literature education is supposed to develop something called "taste" or the love of "good literature," it goes beyond reading and writing to specific sets of preferences and habits of reading and writing. It may

include the development of a tolerance for the variety of literature, of a willingness to acknowledge that many different kinds and styles of work can be thought of as literature, and an acceptance that just because we do not like a certain poem, does not mean that it is not good. It can even lead students to distrust the meretricious or the shoddy use of sentiment. Experienced readers of literature can see that they are being tricked by a book or a film even when the trickery is going on--and they can enjoy the experience.

We should note that these habits and preferences are culture specific. A dramatic example of the clash of cultural values has occurrred over Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses. It is clear that the literary and aesthetic habits of mind of most of the West are not shared by some in the Islamic world. It is also clear that many writer's such as Wole Soyinka are themselves torn when they defend Rushdie on Western terms only to find themselves the targets of another group. This issue writ large in a global scene also divides the citizens of the United States, as the many censorship cases have attested.

Implications for Assessment In order to make a comprehensive assessment of literature learning, then, a testing program needs to cover the whole of the domain--or at least sample from it. At the same time we know little about the relationships among the segments of the domain. It is this issue that the current work of the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature is addressing in the development of prototype measures for assessment. The following are the specific questions addressed:

1. What is the relationship between knowledge and practice?

2. What is the relationship between responding and articulating?

3. What is the relationship between practice and habit?

4. What is the relationship between "literary" and "non-literary" texts and between prose and poetry as they effect practice and habit?

There are some subsidiary technical questions with which we are dealing as well: the relationship between open-book and closed book testing; the relatioship between open-ended and closed-ended responses; and the relationship between short and extended responses.

In order to address these questions, we are preceding in two steps. We have selected six texts: two short stories, two poems, and two non-fiction articles. For each of these we have developed a set of "core" questions covering surface understanding, comprehension (focussing on motivation), text structure, and figurative language. Thus there are sets of question on two "general" and two "literary" aspects of each text. These questions are then turned into the various formats ranging from multiple-choice to essay. In adddition, there will be an aesthetic judgement measure using the format of the ~~Q-sort~~ Likert scale for each passage and a questionnaire concerning habits.

These measures will form the basis of a series of "cross-over" studies in which students will be given two passages, in some cases from the same genre with different aspects or different formats and in some cases with the same format from different genres. Each of these pairings will be examined in order to explore patterns of similarity and difference in performance. At the same time the pairings will be used to pilot the passages and items.

From this pretest and pairing will emerge a pilot form of a comprehensive measure of the domain. This measure will then be tried with another group of students in order to explore more closely the relationships among the various facets of the domain and in order to provide prototypes for a comprehensive assessment of students and programs in literature learning. It is hoped that these protypes may then be considered in various state and local assessments and may even serve to open a dialogue among curriculum makers and publishing companies so that they can sort out the specific goals of literature assessment within a comprehensive framework.

Figure 1

SCHOOL LITERATURE

Knowledge		Practice		Preferred Habits	
TEXTUAL	EXTRA-TEXTUAL	RESPONDING	ARTICULATING	AESTHETIC CHOICE	HABITS
Specific Text	History	Decoding	Retelling	Evaluating	Reading
Cultural Allusion	Author	Envisioning	Criticizing single works	Selecting	Criticizing
	Genres	Analyzing		Valuing	
	Styles	Personalizing	Generalizing across works		
	Critical Terms	Interpreting			